

Criteria for a Sexually Healthy and Responsible Seminary

Religious traditions affirm that sexuality is God's life-giving and life-fulfilling gift. Every member of the clergy will be called upon to address the sexuality needs of the people they serve; yet, only a handful of seminaries in the U.S. are actively preparing their students to assume this important role.

A sexually healthy and responsible seminary is committed to fostering spiritual, sexual, and emotional health for its students, faculty, and staff and providing a safe environment where sexuality issues are addressed with respect, mutuality, and openness.

Every seminary needs to help students address formation issues relating to their own sexuality, understand a range

of sexuality issues including scholarship on sexuality and gender, and develop competencies for addressing sexuality needs in future ministerial and educational settings.

Sexually healthy religious professionals examine their own sexual attitudes and histories; are knowledgeable about sexuality, including sexual behaviors, sexual response, sexual orientation, gender identity, and personal relationships; have a commitment to gender and sexual justice; undertake periodic theological reflection on the integration of sexuality and spirituality; have the skills to provide pastoral care, worship, and referrals on sexuality issues; and are versed in their sacred texts, tradition's teachings and history, and denominational policies on sexuality issues.

Preparation of all students for ministry therefore must include:

- Required coursework on human sexuality and healthy professional boundaries.
- Regularly scheduled course offerings on sexuality issues, including courses on sexual ethics, LGBTQ theology, women in religious traditions and faith communities, and sexual abuse and domestic violence.
- Inclusion of sexuality topics in introductory and core courses, such as Hebrew Bible/Old Testament/Tanakh, New Testament, Theology/Systematics, Ethics, History, Midrash/Rabbinics/Codes, Pastoral Counseling, Worship and Preaching, and Denomination-specific/polity classes.
- Required training for junior and senior faculty as well as deans and advisors on integrating sexuality issues into their classes, advising students with diverse sexualities, and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

In addition, a sexually healthy and responsible seminary has:

- A commitment to gender, racial/ethnic, and sexual diversity in its student body, faculty, staff, and leadership.
- Periodic worship opportunities that address sexuality issues.
- A commitment to inclusive language in worship and in the classroom.
- Library holdings that include current materials on sexuality and religion.
- Seminary-supported student groups that address sexual and gender identities and sexuality needs, such as a Women's Center, LGBTQ Group, Reproductive Rights Group, Support for Married/Coupled Seminarians, HIV Positive persons, and other sexuality-related groups.
- Anti-discrimination and full inclusion policies, addressing sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status, that are widely included in catalogs, admission materials, faculty and student orientations, websites, and periodic postings in newsletters and announcements.
- A commitment to being safe from sexual harassment and abuse, including professional ethics and healthy boundaries policies for students, faculty, and staff and periodic required training opportunities.
- Faculty and leadership who are active on social and sexual justice issues in professional organizations, advocacy organizations, their denomination, and community, including research and publications, public witness, and activism.

The Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing sponsored a one-day colloquium on May 28, 2008 for leading seminary faculty, administrators, and sexuality educators. Participants who support this statement include Dr. Sarah (Sally) C. Conklin, Northern Illinois University; Rev. Dr. Marvin M. Ellison, Bangor Theological Seminary; Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, FaithTrust Institute; Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield, American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago; Rev. Debra W. Haffner, Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing; Rev. Dr. Jay E. Johnson, Pacific School of Religion; Dr. Lori Lefkowitz, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College; Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, Vanderbilt University Divinity School; Dr. Su Yon Pak, Union Theological Seminary; Rabbi Mychal B. Springer, The Jewish Theological Seminary; and Rev. Dr. William Stayton, Widner University and Center for Sexuality and Religion.